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RUEAIIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY

RHMFISS/CJCS WASHINGTON DC//J2/J3/J5// PRIORITY

RHEFDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC//DHO-3/SAFE// PRIORITY

RHMFIU/CDR USPACOM HONOLULU HI//J00/J2/J3/J5// PRIORITY

RHHMHAA/COMPACFLT PEARL HARBOR HI PRIORITY

RHMFIU/CDR JPAC HICKAM AFB HI PRIORITY

RHMFIU/CDRUSARPAC FT SHAFTER HI PRIORITY

RHMFIU/NGA FT BELVOIR VA PRIORITY

RHMFIU/NGA HQ BETHESDA MD PRIORITY

RUEHHI/USDAO HANOI VM PRIORITY

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SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR'S CALL WITH VIETNAM'S MINISTER OF DEFENSE (U)

¶1. (SBU) Summary: Ambassador, accompanied by Defense Attaché, met with Vietnam Minister of Defense, Senior General Phung Quang Thanh, on 19 September 2007 for an introductory call. After a warm welcome, Minister Thanh noted that Vietnam seeks to increase defense cooperation with the United States, but added that Vietnam believes defense cooperation between countries should not have an impact on its relations with third countries. He thanked the United States for its de-mining and unexploded ordinance support, and noted Vietnam continues to support the Fullest Possible Accounting (MIA) humanitarian mission. He said that People's Army's limited English skills make it difficult for Vietnam to perform international activities and he thanked the U.S. for its IMET support for English training. He hoped the U.S. could continue to expand IMET. He stated that Vietnam will participate in the USPACOM Chiefs of Defense (CHOD) conference this year, and that he personally would attend the next Shangri-La conference in Singapore. He welcomed a December visit by the new Commander of U.S. Pacific Command. He said that Vietnam's National Assembly still needs to approve any PAVN participation in a PKO, but added that Vietnam is willing to participate in PKO is the future. Ambassador thanked the Minister for his comments and also for Vietnam's support for MIA recovery. He noted that IMET would expand in the upcoming years, and also said that there are many more areas where both sides can strengthen cooperation. Finally, he encouraged the Minister to consider more security assistance.

¶2. (SBU) Ambassador, accompanied by Defense Attaché, met with Vietnam Minister of Defense, Senior General Phung Quang Thanh, on 19 September 2007 for an introductory call. Minister Thanh warmly welcomed the Ambassador and congratulated him on his appointment. The Minister said that he was confident that United States-Vietnam relations would continue to grow. He said that both sides should increase cooperation in a spirit of friendship. Ambassador thanked the Minister for meeting with him and noted that Vietnam and the

United States already had developed a very positive relationship. He also noted that some of the United States closest allies had shared a history of conflict at some point with the United States. Ambassador stated that his goal was to work to ensure that United States) Vietnam defense relations would continue to improve on the path to deeper cooperation. Ambassador then asked Minister Thanh to share some of his perspectives on the bilateral relationship.

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Closer Cooperation, with Limits

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¶13. (SBU) Minister Thanh noted that both Vietnam and the United States have had ups and downs in their past. He said today Vietnam has a foreign policy of friendship and cooperation and seeks to develop reliable partners and to make friends with every country. In this context, the relationship between Vietnam and the United States has already turned and now looks to the future. We cooperate together with a focus on the economy, science and technology, education and trade.

¶14. (SBU) He said that the government of Vietnam very much understands the economic and military influence of the United States, and wants to develop relations and learn the views of the United States as well. Vietnam's foreign policy objectives are to develop friendship and cooperation with the United States. He noted that there more than 1.5 million ethnic Vietnamese people the United States. Vietnam hopes that these people can be a bridge between our two countries to improve understanding and relations.

¶15. (SBU) He continued that Vietnam has an eight percent

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growth rate for Gross Domestic Product (GDP); and Vietnam has joined the World Trade Organization (WTO) as well. These and other accomplishments show that Vietnam is cooperating together with the United States in many areas. Vietnam also appreciates all of the Untied States, support for the development of Vietnam. Developmental cooperation with the United States is a positive aspect of the foreign policy development of Vietnam

¶16. (SBU) Minister Thanh added the caveat that there are differences between the United States and Vietnam, but these are not as important as the friendship and cooperation. He also noted that it is Vietnam's view that defense cooperation between countries should not have an impact on its relations with third countries.

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De-mining, UXO, Dioxin/Agent Orange, MIA

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¶17. (SBU) The Minister noted that the United States has been has been working closely and cooperative with Vietnam on de-mining, unexploded ordnance (UXO) issues, and even with Agent Orange (AO) cleanup of dioxins from the past war era.

¶18. (SBU) He added that Vietnam also continues to support the Fullest Possible Accounting (MIA) humanitarian mission and he also hoped that the USA could continue to provide Vietnam with information that will help us resolve Vietnam's MIA cases as well.

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IMET and Security Assistance

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¶19. (SBU) Minister Thanh then turned to the issue of International Military Education and Training (IMET). He thanked the Ambassador and the United States for the IMET program that has developed in Vietnam. He particularly noted the language lab and equipment that will soon be delivered.

He also commented on the high value of the scholarships for language study that have been extended to Vietnam's military officers (IMET-funded English language and English language trainer courses). The Minister noted that limitations in the force's English language skills represent a difficulty for Vietnam's military to perform intentional cooperation activities. He said that because of this Vietnam has asked many countries to assist in English language training for Vietnam's officers.

¶10. (SBU) Minister Thanh also noted that Vietnam would like to expand Vietnam's IMET program to include courses in science and technology areas. He concluded the point by saying that if IMET or U.S. government could provide scholarships in these areas it would be a tremendous benefit.

¶11. (SBU) Ambassador agreed with the Minister's comments about the value of education. He noted the importance of education and said that securing an English language lab with IMET for Vietnam was an essential step. He also recalled that IMET training of Vietnam officers in the United States already has been a plus. He noted that the first two officers that Vietnam sent to the English language and English language instructors course at Defense Language Institute/ English language Center (DLI/ELC) in Texas delivered high standards and were very successful in their courses. He noted DLI/ELC is eagerly awaiting the next group of Vietnam officers, and DLI hopes they will be as talented as the first.

¶12. (SBU) The Ambassador continued that during this coming year Vietnam would have IMET training for Search and Rescue

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(SAR), military medical courses and more English. In addition Vietnam would have a chance to participate in several humanitarian assistance training events as well. He said that with programs like IMET, military relations were off to a good start, but could even get better. There are many ways for defense relations to grow even more.

¶13. (SBU) Ambassador noted that both sides had expanded contacts and interaction on the human side, but also could expand cooperation on the material side as well. He noted that Ministry of Defense had just submitted two Letters of Request for spare parts. He welcomed that action and said that the changes in United States defense security cooperation policy meant that many more options were available to Vietnam. He encouraged the Minister to take these new opportunities to promote the security assistance relationship with the United States in a way that could help Vietnam and enhance our relationship.

¶14. (SBU) Minister Thanh thanked the ambassador for his comments and stated that Vietnam also would like to continue to explore more options with IMET as well. He hoped that IMET could be expanded to allow scholarships (course funding) for officers to study military medical and SAR and science and technology topics. He also hoped that the United States could provide support to promote the FMS system with Vietnam for security assistance cooperation.

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Senior Leader Visits
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¶15. (SBU) Ambassador turned to the topic of senior leader visits. He appreciated Minister Thanh's support to the Chief of Staff Army and the Commander, United States Army of the Pacific, Pacific Army Chiefs Conference in Sydney in August. Ambassador noted that the attendance by a Deputy Chief of the General Staff was a very opportunity for he and all the participants to exchange professional views and develop relationships that can enable better cooperation in the region. The Ambassador then expressed his hope that the Chief of the General Staff for the People's Army could

follow up on this success by attending the Chiefs of Defense Conference in Honolulu at the end of October. He said that this conference, which would be hosted by the Commander of the Pacific Command and would likely include the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and would be another valuable opportunity for Vietnam and for the region.

¶16. (SBU) Ambassador noted that the new Commander of the Pacific Command was hoping for an opportunity to visit Vietnam soon and ambassador hoped that this could occur. Finally ambassador inquired about Minister Thanh,s own plans and reminded him that he was welcome and should consider a visit the United States as well.

¶17. (SBU) On the issue of senior leader visits, Minister Thanh said that Vietnam supports a regional peaceful environment as Minister of Defense he have accepted many senior leader visits from the United States including the previous Commander of PACOM. Minister Thanh said that he would continue to welcome all of these types of visits, including by the new PACOM Commander in December.

¶18. (SBU) Minister Thanh then said that he would send a high-ranking officer to the CHOD conference this year, and it would be a Deputy Chief of the General Staff. He himself now planned to go the next annual Defense Ministers gathering at the Shang-ri La conference in Singapore.

¶19. (SBU) Minister Thanh then noted that Vietnam &owes8 the United States a visit since only one Minister of Defense has

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visited the United States, but two U.S. Secretaries of Defense have visited Vietnam. He said that it is likely that he will visit the United States before the Ambassador leaves Vietnam. Minister Thanh followed himself up by adding that he certainly would visit the United States before his own term of office as Minister of Defense is over in 2011.

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Peace Keeping Operation
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¶20. (SBU) Ambassador then inquired about Vietnam,s current bid for a seat on the United Nation Security Council (UNSC) for the2008-2009 session. He asked how the Minister viewed participation in regional or UN Peace Keeping Operation (PKO) missions in the context of the new UNCS responsibilities.

¶21. (SBU) Minister Thanh responded that he believes Vietnam is likely to be UNSC member for the 2008-2009 session. He said this is a strong indication of Vietnam,s growing prominence in the region and Vietnam,s increasing involvement in word issues as well. At present he said that Vietnam conducts exchanges about PKO with a variety of nations. PKO is an area in which Ministry of Defense is still developing its expertise. He noted that Vietnam,s National Assembly still would have to address legal aspects of PAVN participation in a PKO.

¶22. (SBU) Minister Thanh said this is a step there expand our capability to do more and expand cooperation. He noted that in the past Vietnam,s military had experience in Laos and Cambodia with international missions to help the Laos and Cambodian peoples. However, now in a time of peace the PAVN is closely managed by the National Assembly. He wrapped up the point by saying that Vietnam is willing to participate in PKO is the future.

¶23. (SBU) He concluded the meeting by thanking the Ambassador and by saying that during Ambassador,s time in Vietnam he will gain a deep understating on the development and conditions in Viet Nam including on issues like religious freedom. In addition, he added that during Ambassador,s time in Vietnam he have the opportunity to visit military basses far and near and to see first to understanding the friendship

and cooperative spirit of the people of Vietnam He will work close both together for the two nation,s interests.

24 (SBU) Comment: The meeting with Minister Thanh was very positive. He was receptive to increased contacts and expanded areas for cooperation, but also was frank about limits defense relations faced when Vietnam deals with other countries, foremost among them being China. His comments about PKO suggest that Vietnam,s military is still far from ready to participate in any UN PKO, but Vietnam military leaders still feel comfortable moving at a deliberate pace to gain that capability.

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